

Vermont State Technical Committee Meeting

January 17, 2024

In-person: USDA State Office, Colchester and Newmont Farms, Fairlee

Virtual: Microsoft Teams

NEXT MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 17, 2024

Attendees (Colchester): Luis Aponte (NRCS), Angela Hyldborg (NRCS), Eileen Powers (FSA), Michelle Monroe (Senator Welch's Office).

Attending (Newmont Farms, Bradford): Travis Thomason (NRCS), John Roberts (FSA), Nina Gage (VAAFM), Steven Dwinell (VAAFM), Jennifer Byrne (WRNRCD), Amber Reed (UVM Ext), Becky Maden (UVM Ext), and Walt Gladstone (Newmont Farm).

Attending (MS Teams): Bob Thompson (NRCS), Les Wright (NRCS), Kasey Robinson (NRCS), Trevor Saylor (NRCS), Phyllicia Moore (NRCS), Sarah Larose (NRCS), Morgan Sanders (FSA), Sarah Waring (RD), Thomas Renner (Congresswomen Balint's Office), Chris E. Smith (USFWS), William Eldridge (VTFWS), Kate MacFarland (USDA National Agroforestry Center), Bryan Dore (EPA), Ryan Karb (AFT), Suzy Hodgson (UVM Extension), Marli Rupe (DEC), Laura Ranker (DEC), Ryan Patch (VAAFM), Jill Arace (VACD), Jess Miller (VACD), Jeff Farber (VACD), Alli Lewis (VAWQP), Sarah Damsell (OCNRCD), Alissa White (American Farmland Trust), Eric Boatti (NOFA-VT), Paul Hamelin (VT F&W), Dave Adams (VT F&W), Holly McClintock (VHCB), Brad Roy (Vermont Rural Water Association), Jillian Liner (Audubon VT), Eric Howe (LCBP), Kelly Dolan (Farm to Plate), and David Thompson (public).

Vermont USDA State Technical Committee Meeting

January 17, 2024 | 9:30 am-10:45 am

USDA State Office, Colchester; Newmont Farms, Fairlee; and MS Teams

Agenda

Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 – 9:45 am	State Conservationist Welcome and NRCS Update	Travis Thomason
9:45 – 9:50 am	Farm Service Agency Update	John Roberts
9:50 – 9:55 am	Rural Development Update	Sarah Waring
9:55 – 10:10 am	Legislative Update	Congressional Delegations
10:10 – 10:20 am	Programs Update	Kasey Robinson
10:20 – 10:30 am	Watershed Program Intro	Bob Thompson Les Wright
10:30 – 10:40 am	RCPP Plans and Ideas	Luis Aponte
10:40 – 10:45 am	Wrap-up	Travis Thomason

Welcome and NRCS Updates:

Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS Vermont

Welcome. Thank you to Newmont Farm, the Gladstone Family, and the Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance (CRWFA) for allowing us to partner and hold our meeting from this location to be able to attend the CRWFA Annual meeting afterwards. Review of the agenda.

NRCS Updates

Farm Bill

- The new Farm Bill has not been passed yet
- Operating under a 2018 Farm Bill extension through September 2024
- Important in Vermont because many of our farmers have run into payment limitations, especially the farmstead producers with EQIP contracts
- Hoping that Congress will work something out and have a new Farm Bill later this year
- All Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) program authorities go through 2031 (EQIP, CSP, RCPP, ACEP)
- CRP/CREP has its own authorities, not through IRA

Locally Led Conservation CPI

- Locally Led Conservation is an important process for NRCS and is how local folks can influence and help improve our programs.
- We've started a Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) process for Locally Led Conservation.
- On January 11th we held the Information Gathering/Listening Session with NRCD (District Managers), VACD, and a few State partners.
- We received some great feedback on areas that can be improved.
- Most of the NRCS programs are not designed for Vermont (more for mid-west states) so we need to take advantage of every flexibility allowed to be sure they work for Vermont.
- There will be a two-day, in-person session at the end of January for next steps.
- And then we will continue to make the necessary improvements in fiscal year 2025 and beyond.

State Technical Committee Bus Tour

- Tentative dates: September 11th or 18th
 - Tentative: Two buses, approximately 70 people
 - Focus area this year will be Franklin and Orleans Counties
 - Focus on NRCS and Partner projects
 - If interested in assisting with planning, send Travis an email (travis.thomason@usda.gov)
-

Farm Service Update:

Eileen Powers, Programs Specialist

Program Updates

Conservation Reserve Program/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP/CREP)

- Farm Bill Extension: There was a notice last week regarding the extension on the Farm Bill for this program, so now we are allowed to enter new applications and re-enrollments into the system.
- Regarding re-enrollments, in the past we were not allowed to enter them into our system until April, which was going into the busier season. National recognized this challenge and are allowing re-enrollments to be entered now.

- Waiver process: The Acting Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs has announced that he is delegating the FSA State Committee to handle the waiver requests. We no longer have to send every enrollment to Washington and wait for a response. Hopefully the next Farm Bill will bring a retraction of the waiver process.

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)

- A program to help restore farmland, cropland, and pastures that were damaged by a natural event.
- Vermont may win the award for the most concurrent ECPs and disasters in the country (July 2022 Windstorm, December 2022 Winter Storm Elliott, July 2023 Flooding, December 2023 Flooding, January 2024 High Winds).

Personnel

- Courtney LeCuyer - New County Executive Director for Windham, Orange, and Windsor Counties
 - Former Program Technician in White River Junction office and then went into the County Executive Director Training program
 - Based in White River Junction and Brattleboro
- Morgan Sanders - New Assistant Program Specialist for Programs, Loans, Administrative functions

Rural Development Update:

Sarah Waring, State Director, RD VT/NH

Program Updates

Rural Business Development Grant

- Awarded to non-profit entities to support small businesses is open and has a deadline in February.
- This relates to our farm, food, and forestry partners because many of our Technical Service Providers (TSP) use this funding to provide business support services to farmers.
- Past applicants include VHCB, NOFA-VT, Interval who use these funds to support their business specialists that they have on staff.
- The Farm and Forest Viability Program (offered by VHCB) is one example of how nonprofits can use that funding source to support farmers and agriculture producers and folks especially impacted by flood related or disaster related conditions.

Rural Energy for America Program (REAP)

- Soon you will see another round of awards.
- By statute these must be competitive (not a rolling application), so they have shifted from twice a year to four times a year to apply.

Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

- Funding was awarded for additional technical assistance.
- We are planning to put out a press release next week.
- We have three new service providers for farmers and specific small businesses who applied to our Vermont office to work in the state of Vermont to provide technical assistance for REAP applicants.
- This could include helping with the sams.gov number and application process, writing the grant application itself, helping to analyze the financials or submit the package, to doing an energy audit or assessment so they have the correct numbers going into the application process.

Value-Added Producer Grant

- National will send a notice of funding soon and it is a competitive process.
- We usually receive a few applicants for value added products, marketing costs, cash flow, etcetera.

Other RD Updates

- RD has dual state jurisdiction (VT/NH) and New Hampshire has been very busy.
- In December, Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small, did a visit through NH, including visiting with a roundtable of agricultural producers alongside Congresswoman Ann McLane Kuster. One of the biggest issues was insurance related to excessive moisture and rain and the freeze in May.
- On January 8th, [Secretary Vilsack visited New Hampshire](#). A town hall meeting was hosted in Durham, NH, near UNH, which receives a lot of funding from USDA. In addition to a roundtable discussion where producers spoke to the Secretary about insurance and whole farm or revenue based programs and the challenges for northeast farmers in accessing some of the RMA programs, they also talked about which programs are most accessible post disaster. The Secretary was able to hold a town hall speech about the most recent appropriations bills and the programs that they have generated and how farms and farmers, especially small and medium sized farmers, can now “access” a lot more programs and how many more opportunities there are now.

Comments/Questions:

Question: *Walt Gladstone (Newmont Farm)* – Was the Secretary’s speech recorded and can we get access to it?

Answer: *Sarah Waring (RD)* – Yes, it was recorded. Access is not available yet, as video content must be transcribed and made 508 compliant but will be shared when available.

Question: *Jennifer Byrne (WRCD)* – This is a multi-part question. Last time at this meeting you said that there's enough money to pay for solar on every farm in Vermont, and I'm wondering if that's still true? (Asking for the benefit of the TA providers and the farmers in this room.) Is an energy audit required before accessing that program? Is this the program REAP? And is there any interplay between the NRCS funded energy audits, the Ag energy management plans, and Rural Development?

Answer: *Sarah Waring (RD)* – Yes, the program I’m referencing is an on-going, regular, quarterly RD program called [Rural Energy for America Program](#) (REAP) funded through the Farm Bill. However, the Inflation Reduction Act increased funding available for the program and changed some of the eligibility requirements, so that producers can get more money and more grant money depending on the technology that is chosen. If a producer is doing an energy efficiency upgrades, many of the metrics in terms of grant eligibility are the same. If the producer is going to zero emission and completely renewable energy to replace fossil fuel than the grant eligibility might increase.

How much money do we have left? They don't tell me that information, that's saved for the National Office. But based on the numbers – for the last ten years we’ve done between \$1-\$1.8 million between the two states. Last year we did \$6 million, but the ask was \$9 million. So, we are totally able to meet the requests if the applications are eligible and the producers fully complete the application.

RD and NRCS worked together last year to outline how producers can split their projects into two phases and use RD funds for phase one and NRCS funds for phase two. Or how to fund different parts of the project with the different funding. (Example: Use one funding for the energy audit and the other funding for the equipment.) [IRA CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS Vermont Updates](#)
[Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Loans and Grants](#)

Important: Service Providers and Producers, it is very important to let both agencies (RD and NRCS) know if you are applying for both funding sources so we can work with you to phase the funding in the correct way. If you don't tell us that you're using both, you may run into a challenge because you can't match them easily. It requires careful collaboration.

Legislative Updates

Senator Sander's Office

- No one present/No update

Senator Welch's Office

Michelle Monroe, Communications and Outreach Representative, michelle_monroe@welch.senate.gov

- Introduced a new bill called the Buffer Act, which will hopefully be included in the new Farm Bill, that will end the waiver process. This should get farmers easier access to CRP.
- Introduced a bill called the Weather Act, which Senator Welch will be talking about in Vermont next week. It is an Index Insurance policy. Goal to provide a ready and easily usable policy for diversified farms but available for all farms. Insurance is purchased indexed to a nature disaster weather event. If the event occurs, the policy holder is pay (within 30 days) based on the average damage to the farms in that county. It will continue to payout each month if the event continues to exceed the index. The bill will require USDA to develop something like this.
- Farm Bill – Still negotiating in the Senate, but close. The “battle” is between funding for commodities programs and funding for nutrition programs. Hoping to get a change to the class one mover included as well. Unsure what will happen in the House.
- Current priority is avoiding a government shutdown.
- The [Pandemic Assistance Revenue Program](#) (PARP) recently paid out. We are aware that there is a lot of disappointment over the payments. There was over \$7 billion in request and only about \$223 million was paid. Farmers got paid 9.5% of their losses. It covered income losses. Folks have requested more funding for PARP, but not sure that it is possible.

Comments/Questions:

Comment: *Walt Gladstone (Newmont Farm)* – Glad to hear about the new Weather Act bill. Current process seems very subjective, but perhaps it's also a lack of communication.

Comment: *Jennifer Byrne (WRCD)* – One of the grants the White River Conservation District received is to promote RMA programs. The RMA Whole Farm/Micro Farm Insurance deadline is March 15th. WRCD is hosting a webinar on February 2nd. The closest RMA office is in Raleigh, NC. One of the administrators from that office will be in Vermont on January 30th, attending the VVBGA meeting. She will be looking to meet with people while here. I'm also interested in the Weather Act and how it might align with RMA programs.

Response: *Michelle Monroe (Senator Welch's Office)* – The bill contains an outline / general principles of what we would like to see in an Index Insurance program, but USDA will design the program. Then it will go back to Congress to enact it and decide on funding levels.

Congresswoman Balint's Office

Thomas Renner, Community Liaison and Constituent Services Representative, thomas.renner@mail.house.gov

- Was in attendance, but had to leave for another meeting
- Thanked Michelle from Senator Welch's Office for providing her updating (via the Teams chat)

NRCS Programs Update

Kasey Robinson, Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)

- Funded through EQIP or EQIP's Organic Initiative
- Three eligible groups: Certified Organic, Exempt from Certification of the NOP, Transitioning to Organic

- List of Common OTI Practices
- Application Cut-Off Date: March 1, 2024

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – Round 2

- Focus is on Climate Smart Ag and Forestry practices to utilize IRA funding
- If not eligible for CSP IRA funding, they will go CSP general until all funds are spent
- If we have excess CPS (general or IRA) applications, they will be carried over to FY25
- Application Cut-Off: March 29, 2024
- Ranking: June 2024
- Approval: July 2024
- Obligation: August 2024

Comments/Questions: None

Watershed Program Introduction *(See slides for details)*

Bob Thompson, State Conservation Engineer

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program:

- Installing small watershed dams across the country (Watershed Size - 250,000 acres or less)
- History: Started in the 1940s and 1950s. Mostly flood control. 11,800 dams across the country
- Statutory Requirements and Sponsor Responsibility
- Examples of Projects: Flood Control, Water Based Recreation (with another purpose), Erosion and Sediment Control, Water Supply, Wetland Restoration to improve Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat and Recharge Groundwater, Water Quality Improvements
- Approximately 2100 projects nationally with 60% flood control dams
- Listing of Project Types with percentage of Engineering and Construction costs paid by NRCS
- Planning and Timeline set by policy
 - Request for assistance
 - Preliminary Investigation & Feasibility Report (PIFR) – 6 months
 - Supplemental Watershed Plan & Environmental Document – 2 years
 - Design – 2 years
 - Construction – 2 years
- Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project is an example of the possibility for this program

Comments/Questions: None

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Plans and Ideas *(See slides for details)*

Luis Aponte, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Program Goals and Objectives:

- RCPP helps producers protect working agricultural lands to ensure resilience to climate change by increasing the sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources.
- RCPP projects are typically for five years
- NRCS and partners co-invest in conservation activities to address resource concerns at a regional scale.
- Private or Tribal agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or associated land on which an eligible activity would benefit agricultural land.
- Eligibility: Partners, Producers and Landowners, Land

- Funding Pools and Authorities: Farm Bill 2018 and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
 - Project Types: RCPP Classic and Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA)
 - State/Multi-state
 - Critical Conservation Areas (CCA)
 - Programmatic Partnership Agreement
 - FY24 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – should come out any day now!
 - Significant funding opportunity through IRA! Reach out to Luis Aponte (luis.aponte@usda.gov) with questions and ideas for partnership.
-

Wrap-up

Travis Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS Vermont

Future meetings:

- April 17, 2024, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm
- July 17, 2024, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm
- Fall 2024 – Field Tour to highlight partner projects (details to come)

Thank you so much.

Meeting adjourned at 10:39 am

Welcome to the ...

VT State Technical Committee Meeting – January 17, 2024



Ground Rules for Hybrid Meetings

REMOTE attendees:

- MUTE your microphone in TEAMS
- Attendance: Type your name, title and affiliation into the chat (if system allowed)
- Questions: “Raise your hand” or type your question in the chat
- **Important reminder:** The Teams chat is for questions or comments relevant to the current topic/presentation. Please do not have “side conversations” in the chat

IN-PERSON attendees:

- Attendance: Sign in on the attendance sheet
- We are using a video camera, “Poly” which is in the south-east corner of the room in Colchester and an “Owl” device in the center of the room in Bradford.
 - Talk clearly and look towards the Poly/Owl
 - If logged into TEAMS, mute your microphone, speaker and camera
 - Poly/Owl will serve as the microphone, speaker, and camera for the rooms
 - Please avoid side conversations as the Poly/Owl will pick them up and make it difficult for Teams participants to hear and it will distort the recording and transcript
- Questions: Raise your hand or use the chat in Teams



Agenda



Time	Topic	Speaker
9:30 – 9:45 am	State Conservationist Welcome and NRCS Update	Travis Thomason
9:45 – 9:50 am	Farm Service Agency Update	John Roberts
9:50 – 9:55 am	Rural Development Update	Sarah Waring
9:55 – 10:10 am	Legislative Update	Congressional Delegation
10:10 – 10:20 am	Programs Update	Kasey Robinson
10:20 – 10:30 am	Watershed Program Intro	Bob Thompson Les Wright
10:30 – 10:40 am	RCPP Plans and Ideas	Luis Aponte
10:40 – 10:45 am	Wrap-up	Travis Thomason

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Interested in Renewable Energy generation or Energy Efficiency for your farm?

Learn more about USDA RD's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) and USDA NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) On-Farm Energy funding and contact your local office about your project.

	USDA Rural Development: Rural Energy for America Program	USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: EQIP On Farm Energy
What is the purpose?	Provide grants and loan guarantees to farmers and rural businesses for renewable energy/energy efficiency projects	Provide funding for EQIP assistance for comprehensive nutrient management plans (CNMPs) anaerobic digesters, energy audits and the purchase, installation, or retrofit of certain buildings or equipment to improve energy efficiency.
Who is eligible?	Any farmer receiving greater than 50% of revenue from ag production and any small rural business in an eligible area, and meeting SBA definition.	Any person, legal entity, Indian Tribe, Alaska Native corporation, or joint operation with signature authority who is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management or have an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation associated with the land offered for enrollment.
What can be funded?	BOTH energy efficiency (lights, insulation, cooling, doors, windows, replacement of energy efficiency equipment, etc.) and renewable energy projects (solar, hydrogen, digestors, biomass, wind, etc.)	CNMPs, energy audits, anaerobic digesters, reverse osmosis, lighting, plate coolers, ventilation, irrigation pumps, grain dryers, greenhouse improvements, insulation and building envelope improvements, etc.)
What is the process?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visit with RD's Energy Coordinator. 2. Find a project consultant for renewable energy projects 3. Obtain an Energy Audit for energy efficiency projects 4. Start your application 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visit with local NRCS office 2. Complete a CNMP (for anaerobic digester) 3. Complete an energy audit (for energy practices) 4. Start your application
How much of the project cost can be grant funded?	For REAP projects – depending on your technology, up to 50% of your project costs can be grant funded up to \$500,000 for energy efficiency or up to \$1,000,000 for a renewable energy project. RD also has a Loan Guarantee Program, and we could work with your lender to reduce your lender's risk for your project.	For EQIP - a payment rate of up to 75% for general applicants and up to 90% for historically underserved applicants project scenario costs can be awarded, up to \$450,000.

What else is important to know?	As an applicant, you must be pre-registered with the System for Award Management (SAM) and also have a Unique Entity ID . Neither of these applications cost money, but they can take time so be sure to get this taken care of right away. SAM is an annual free registration.	The CNMP or energy audit is completed by NRCS-certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs) (These can be funded through EQIP): https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/technical-assistance/technical-service-providers
How do I learn more?	Contact Tracy Rexford, Energy Coordinator for Vermont/New Hampshire: tracy.rexford@usda.gov	Contact local NRCS service center. Locations to your nearest service center can be found on https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator .
When do I apply ?	We take applications throughout the year, and review for funding on a quarterly basis.	We take applications continuously throughout the year.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Do these programs require match funding?
 - a. Yes, REAP requires a match that depends on how much of your project may be covered by a grant (if 25% grant, then 75% match. If 50% grant, then 50% match, etc.
 - b. Under the general EQIP payment process, a producer is reimbursed after a conservation practice is certified as meeting NRCS standards and specifications. This process often means that producers must pay up front for costs with their own funds. Payment rates for EQIP can be found here: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/payment-schedules>.
2. Can I match RD and NRCS funds for my project?
 - a. For a single project, the federal REAP and EQIP grant funding together could not exceed 50%. A project using REAP Inflation Reduction Act funds cannot exceed a federal grant share of more than 50% of the total project cost, and regular REAP funding is 25% of total project costs. A project using EQIP funding only varies by conservation practice; payment rates can be found here: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/payment-schedules>.
3. Who can I talk to about my project?
 - a. For REAP, contact Tracy Rexford, Energy Coordinator: tracy.rexford@usda.gov
 - b. For EQIP, find your local service center on this webpage: <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator>.
4. I already have efficient equipment, but I need an upgrade. Can I apply to RD or NRCS?
 - a. If you reduce energy consumption, we can upgrade existing equipment with REAP.
 - b. EQIP funds can be used to upgrade efficient equipment if the upgrade will result in a higher amount of energy being saved. This may require an additional energy plan being completed to make this determination.
5. I'd like to do solar, what program should I use?
 - a. Talk to RD about REAP.
6. I'd like to do a digester, what program should I use?
 - a. Talk to both NRCS and RD because there may be a way to split your digester project into two phases and use both programs!



Programs Update 1-17-2023

Kasey Robinson
Acting ASTC-Programs

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov

Organic Transition Initiative (OTI)

NRCS can help organic producers improve their operations or help producers transition to organic using a conservation plan tailored to their needs.

Organic producers may apply to either EQIP or EQIP's Organic Initiative. The EQIP Organic Initiative has a smaller ranking pool, and cap on funding.

OTI Eligibility

- **Certified Organic** - producers with a [USDA National Organic Program](#) (NOP) Organic Certificate or proof of good standing from a USDA accredited certifying agent. The certification must be maintained for the life of the EQIP contract.
- **Exempt from Certification of the NOP** - producers who are selling less than \$5,000 a year in organic agricultural products and are exempt from NOP's certification. Exempt organic producers are eligible for the EQIP Organic Initiative if they self-certify that they agree to develop and work toward implementing an Organic Systems Plan (OSP), as required by the NOP.
- **Transitioning to Organic** - producers who are in the process of transitioning to organic. Transitioning producers self-certify that they agree to develop and work toward implementing an OSP, as required by the NOP.

OTI Common Practices

- Improving irrigation efficiency;
- Developing a Conservation Activity Plan for Transition that can be part of the OSP;
- Establishing buffer zones;
- Creating pollinator habitat;
- Improving soil health and controlling erosion;
- Developing a grazing plan and supportive livestock practices;
- Enhancing cropping rotations;
- Nutrient and pest management activities;
- Managing cover crops; and
- [Installing a high tunnel system.](#)



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov

Organic Transition Initiative Dates

Application Cut-Off: 03/01/2024

Conservation Stewardship Program Round 2

Sign-Up 2 is being established to promote Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Practices to utilize our Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) money.

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-10/NRCS-CSAF-Mitigation-Activities-List.pdf>

CSP Round 2 Dates

Application Cut-Off: 03/29/2024

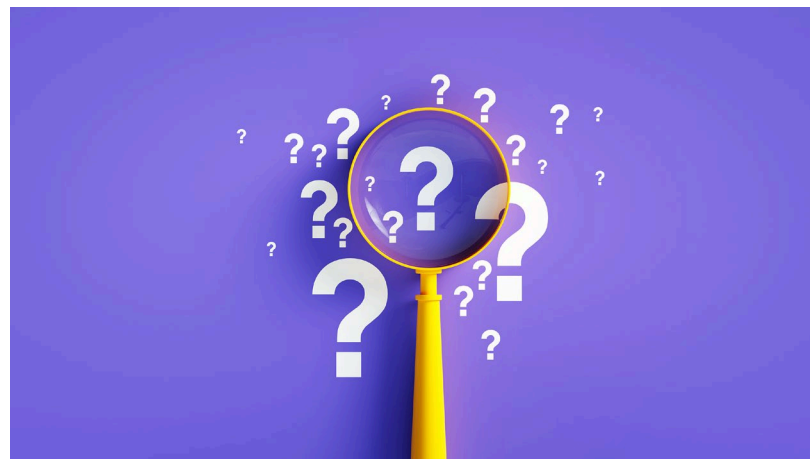
Ranking: 06/2024

Approval: 07/2024

Obligation: 08/2024

If we have excess General or IRA CSP applications, they will be carried over to FY25 sign-ups.

Questions



Kasey Robinson
Acting ASTC-Programs
USDA NRCS Vermont
(620) 931-8092
kasey.Robinson@usda.gov

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov

Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS – Watershed Programs

Watershed & Flood Prevention Operations

Jan. 2024

Bob Thompson, State Conservation Engineer

Les Wright, Watershed Engineer



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

NRCS - Watershed Programs

- **Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program**
Provides technical and financial assistance to entities of State and local governments and Tribes (project sponsors) for planning and installing watershed projects.
- **Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB)**
Offers financial and technical assistance to rehabilitate dams constructed through NRCS Watershed Programs. This program extends the service life of dams to meet applicable safety and performance standards or decommissions dams so they no longer pose a threat to life and property.
- **Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)**
Safeguards lives and property from floods, drought, and the products of erosion on any watershed whenever fire, flood or any other natural occurrence is causing or has caused a sudden impairment of the watershed.
 - EWPP Recovery Assistance
 - EWPP FPE (Floodplain Easement)
- **More Information go to:**
 - <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/landscape/?&cid=NRCSSEPRD1859828>



History

- Started in 1940's and 1950's
- Mostly Flood Control
- 11,800 Dams
- Channel Restoration
- Other

Statutory Requirements

- Public Sponsor
 - Town, State, Municipality, Conservation District, etc.
- Watershed < 250,000 Acres
- Max. Capacity – 25,000 Acre-Feet
- Rural Areas < 50,000 people
- 20% Benefits must be Agricultural/Rural
- Authorized Watershed Plan
 - Environmental Assessment



Sponsor Responsibility

- Power of Eminent Domain
- Permits & Licenses
- Authority to Levy Taxes
- Financial
- Operation & Maintenance
- Typical Sponsor
 - Town, State, Municipality, Conservation District, etc.





Flood Control



Flood protection for agricultural land and urban areas

Recreation areas
Fish and wildlife habitat

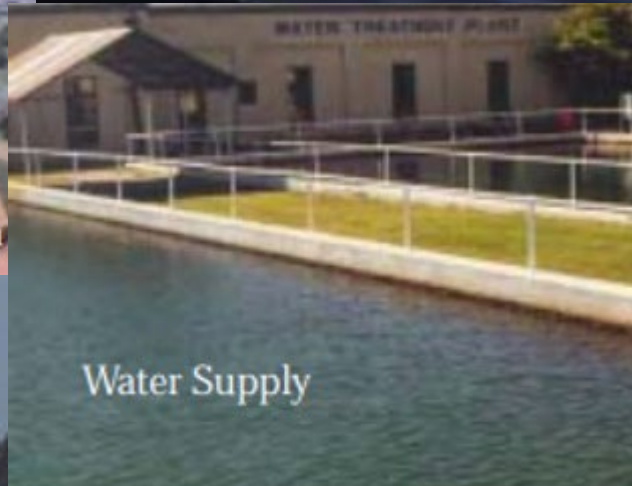
Conservation



Wetland Restoration to improve Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat and Recharge Groundwater



Water Based Recreation



Water Supply



Erosion and Sediment Control

Projects – 2100
Dams – 60%



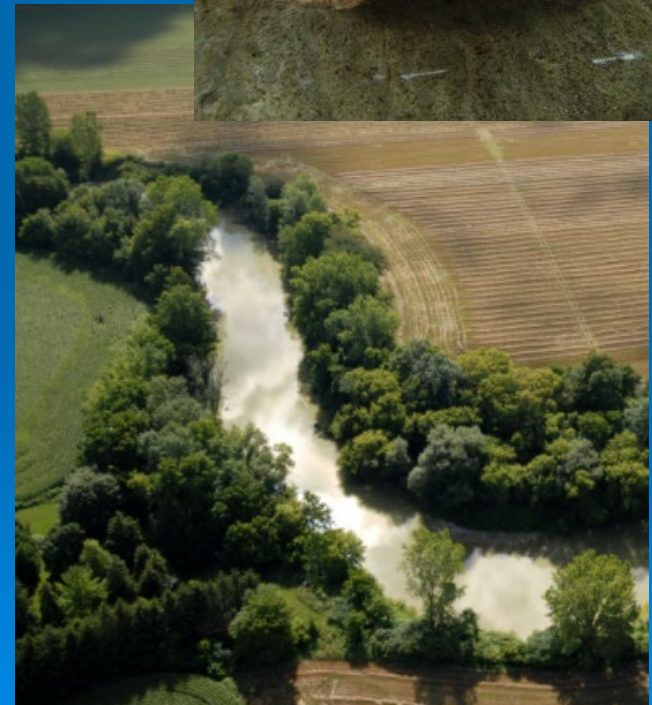
Water Quality Improvements

Watershed Protection



100% Engineering/Construction % Varies

- Consists of onsite treatment of watershed natural resources concerns for the primary purpose of reducing offsite floodwater, erosion, sediment, and agriculture-related pollutants.
- May include ecosystem restoration type activities.
- Measures can include:
 - Any practice or combination of Conservation Practices.
 - Land treatment practices installed by land users to conserve and develop any of the following; soil, water quality and quantity, woodland, fish and wildlife habitats, energy, recreation and scenic resources.

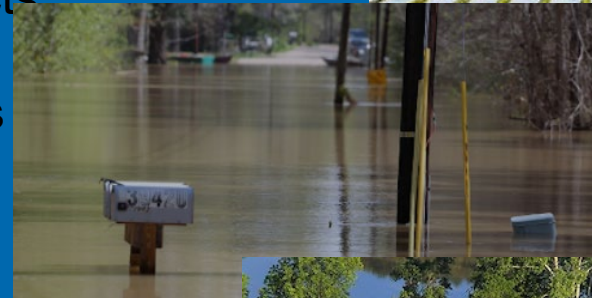


Flood Prevention



100% Engineering/100% Construction

- Measures are installed to prevent or reduce damages caused by floodwater.
- The control and disposal of surface water caused by abnormally high direct precipitation, stream overflow, or floods aggravated or caused by wind or tidal effects
- Measures should:
 - reduce or prevent floodwater damages by reducing runoff, erosion, and sediment;
 - modifying the susceptibility of improvements in the floodplain to damage;
 - removing damageable property from the floodplain;
 - or reducing the frequency, depth, or velocity of flooding.
- Measures may also include actions that prevent encroachment into the floodplain.



Public Recreation

100% Engineering/Up to 50% Construction

- Public recreation developments may be included in a watershed project plan when the SLO agrees to operate and maintain a reservoir or other area for public recreation.
- Measures must include only minimum basic facilities needed for public health and safety and access to and use of the area.
 - Picnic areas, sanitary facilities, fishing piers, shelters, cooking grills, parking areas, swimming beaches, access roads, water, and trails.
 - Also included are practices to provide needed access, water, and power.



Public Fish & Wildlife



100% Engineering/Up to 50% Construction

- Fish and wildlife development areas may be included in a watershed project plan when the SLO agrees to operate and maintain a reservoir or other area for public fish and wildlife access.
- Measures installed for public use of areas developed to improve the habitat or the environment for the breeding, growth, and development of fish and wildlife may be included in a watershed project plan.



Ag. Water Management



Up to 100% Engineering/Up to 50% Construction

- Includes drainage, ground water recharge, irrigation, water conservation, water quality improvement, and agricultural (including rural communities) water supply.
- Measures planned for these purposes are installed on non-Federal land by the SLO to benefit groups of landowners and communities. Measures on Federal land will be installed and maintained in accordance with mutually satisfactory arrangements among the SLO, the land administering agency, and NRCS.



Municipal & Industrial Water Supply

0% Engineering/Up to 50% Construction

- The term “municipal water supply system” means the reservoirs, canals, ditches, flumes, laterals, pipes, pipelines, and other surface facilities and systems constructed or installed for the collection, impoundment, storage, transportation, or distribution of drinking water.
- Measures include those necessary to provide storage capacity in reservoirs to increase the availability of water for present and future municipal and industrial use.
 - Needed outlet works and pipelines to convey water from the reservoir to the existing or proposed treatment facilities or water system are also considered project measures.



Water Quality Management

Up to 100% Engineering/Construction % Varies

Water quality management measures provide water storage capacity in reservoirs for regulation of stream flow to improve water quality in streams.



Planning & Timeline



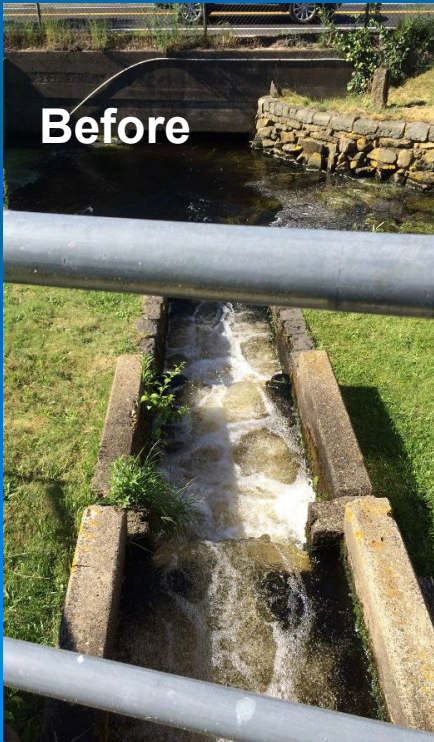
- “NRCS will use the watershed approach and the conservation planning process, as described in Title 180, National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), Part 600, to assist the SLO in developing a watershed project plan.”
- Request for Assistance
- PIFR – Preliminary Investigation & Feasibility Report – 6 Months
- Supplemental Watershed Plan & Environmental Document – 2 Years
- Design – 2 Years
- Construction – 2 Years

Cape Cod Water Resources Restoration Project (CCWRRP)



Aquatic Organism Habitat & Passage

Before



After



Improve water quality
Bivalve Aquaculture





Questions?

Bob Thompson

bob.thompson@usda.gov



United States Department of Agriculture



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



RCPP Intro

01/17/2024, Luis Aponte, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



United States Department of Agriculture

Program Goals and Objectives



What: RCPP helps producers protect working agricultural lands to ensure resilience to climate change by increasing the sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources.

Duration: RCPP projects are typically for five years



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





United States Department of Agriculture

Program Goals and Objectives



How: NRCS and partners co-invest in conservation activities to address resource concerns at a regional scale.

Where: Private or Tribal agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or associated land on which an eligible activity would benefit agricultural land.



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/





Who is Eligible

Partner Eligibility

Eligible organizations interested in partnering with NRCS on conservation projects can develop applications for the RCPP competition. The lead partner for an RCPP project is the entity that submits an application, and if selected for an award is ultimately responsible for collaborating with NRCS to successfully complete an RCPP project.

See the RCPP funding announcement for details about what types of organizations are eligible to apply.

Producer and Landowner Eligibility

Once NRCS selects a project and executes an RCPP agreement with a lead partner, agricultural producers may participate in an RCPP project in one of two ways. First, producers may engage with project partners and delegate a willing partner to act as their representative in working with NRCS. Second, producers seeking to carry out conservation activities consistent with a RCPP project in the project's geographic area can apply directly to NRCS.

Land Eligibility

RCPP projects must be carried out on agricultural or nonindustrial private forest land or associated land on which NRCS determines an eligible activity would help achieve conservation benefits (i.e., improved condition of natural resources resulting from implementation of conservation activities).

Eligible conservation activities may be implemented on public lands when those activities will benefit eligible lands as determined by NRCS and are included in the scope of an approved RCPP project.



Funding Pools & Authorities



Farm Bill 2018

- Funding for FY 2019-2031:
 - \$300M annually
- Funding does not expire
- Limit of 15 AFA's per year

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

- Funding for FY 2023-2026:
 - \$300M in FY 23
 - \$800M in FY 24
 - \$1.5B in FY 25
 - \$2.4B in FY 26
- Funding expires in FY 2031
- NRCS must prioritize climate-smart proposals
- No limit on AFAs per year



Project Types



RCPP Classic

- Partner defined project
- NRCS responsible for FA execution through producer contracts, easements, and watershed agreements
- Partner may deliver FA in support of NRCS producer Contracts
- NRCS involved in technical assistance, may delegate some to partner

Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA)

- Partner led project
- Partner contracts directly with eligible producers/landowners or performs work on their behalf
- Partner expected to deliver all technical assistance



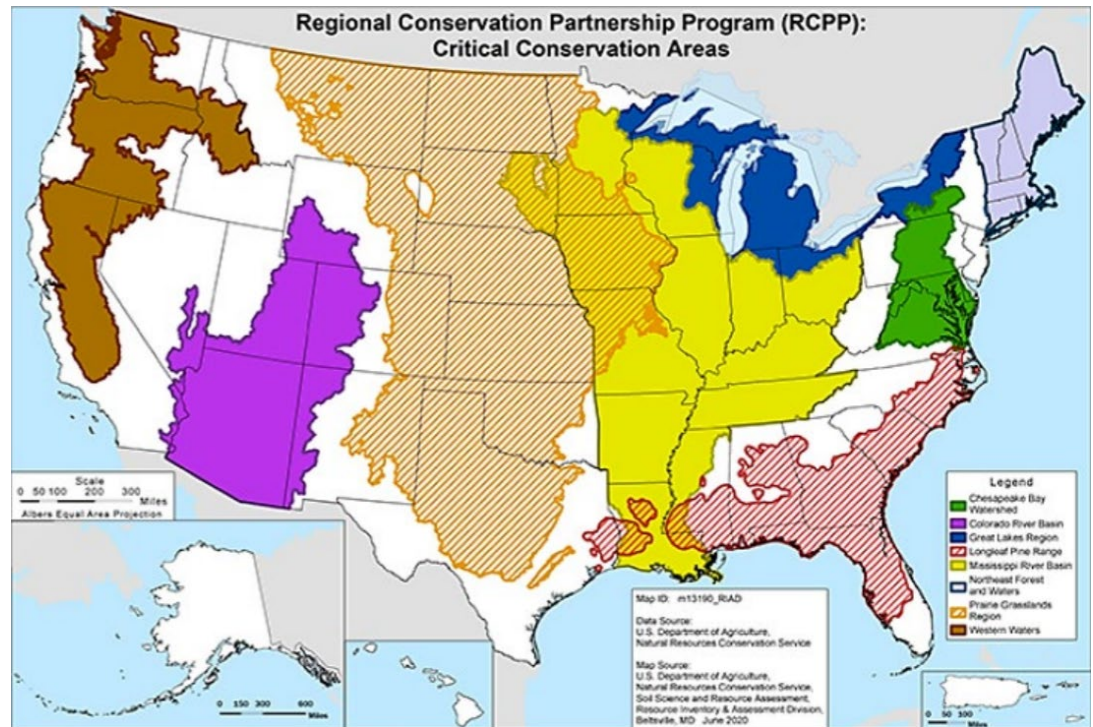
Funding Pools & Authorities

State/Multi-state

- Can include any RCPP resource concern or conservation benefit

Critical Conservation Areas(CCA)

- Project and producer contracts or easements must include one CCA priority RC.
- Multiple CCA's not allowed



Programmatic Partnership Agreement

- NRCS and lead partner will work closely on PPA.
- Deliverables: FA, TA, etc.
- Setting Outcomes: What is the impact? Social or economic factors
- Exhibits: Side bars for TA-E(RCPP specific TA authority, related to partner project management) and TA-I (Traditional tied to FA applications and contracts) NOTE: Updates are being planned to simplify TA.



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



FY24 NOFO



Any day now!



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

Food for thought



- Ask questions, inquire, engage STC and RCPP coordinator early and often.
- Are you or do you know of any partners with interest?
- What contributions can you make (expertise, time, project management)
- What would be your focus area?
- What role/amount of TA-I?



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/



Questions



Luis Aponte
ASTC-Field Operations
USDA NRCS Vermont
802-881-7984
Luis.Aponte@usda.gov



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/

EEO



FPAC's Civil Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity Division (CREEOD) ensures equal employment opportunities and program access for all FPAC employees and customers. It ensures that every employee, applicant and program participant is treated with dignity, equality and respect by enforcing Civil Rights (CR) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statutes, protected federal laws, policies, management directives and executive orders.





United States Department of Agriculture



Vermont State Technical Committee FY 2024 Dates

April 17, 2024

July 17, 2024

Field Tour planned for Fall 2024



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

nrcs.usda.gov/